

SOME
ACCOUNT
OF THE
LIFE and DEATH
OF
MATTHEW LEE,
Executed at TYBURN,

October 11, 1752, in the 20th Year of
his Age.

L O N D O N:

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M A T T H E W L E E, &c.

MATTHEW LEE was born in Croft in Lincolnshire, was educated in that neighbourhood; and at eleven years of age, put apprentice to a shoe-maker in Brator near Spillsbury, and served his time to the approbation of his master: was of a sober, quite disposition, and esteemed for his good-nature and integrity. Shortly after the expiration of his apprenticeship, by the invitation of his brother he came to London; but being used to coarse country work unskilled in the method of working in London, and but a slow hand withal, he was incapable, by his business, of gaining even the necessaries of life. This involved him in great difficulties and dis-

treffes, his relations not being in circumstances to grant him any assistance. On his application to them for advice, what method to pursue, he was advised to get a Waiter's or Drawers place at an Inn.

After some time he was hired to the Swan at Fulham, where he lived contentedly and agreeably, gained the good-will of those whom he conversed with, and kept his character unblemished. He afterwards lived at a public house in Carnaby-market; from thence he went to the Three Tuns in New-street, Fetter-lane, where he continued to live, till within a fortnight before the robbery: when a person who came frequently to drink at his master's house, and with whom Matthew had contracted an intimacy, one day told him that it lay in his power to be of great benefit to him, and if he would hearken to his advice, he might live more easy and more advantageously than he could do in a public house: Matthew inquired into the particulars of the affair; Walton (for so was his companion's name) informed him, That his aunt had left him a large legacy, and he was now going to receive the same, and if he would quit his present service, and attend on him, he would give him great wages, and he should live as himself. He the more readily agreed thereto, from a desire to be freed from the threatnings of a woman with whom

whom he had sinful commerce. He had borrowed money of her, which he was at present incapable of paying her, for which she frequently threatened him with a gaol. This made him the more willing to leave his place to be freed from her importunity. Accordingly he packed up his clothes, with what money he had, and went from his place with his new pretended master.

But he soon found his mistake: they wandered up and down, till their money being expended, and no lawful prospect of a recruit, Walton shewed Lee a pistol, and said, "This must stand our friend, and supply us with all we want." When he objected to the proposal, the other with dreadful curses threatened to blow his brains out if he did not comply. While they were arguing upon the point, they had an opportunity of putting their design in execution: for in the midst of their discourse, Mr. Chalmer came in sight. Walton gave Lee the pistol to attack him, but his heart failed; he sat down on the side of the field, and Mr. Chalmer passed by uninterrupted.

For this, Walton reproached him bitterly: upon which they both followed him, Lee with his pistol, and Walton with a large stick, and robbed the gentleman of his watch and fourteen shillings. Had Walton been contented with what the gentleman had given him, in all probability they might have escaped; but Walton perceiving a

bulk in his pocket (which was thirteen guineas) demanded it, which Mr. Chalmer refused, and recovering his spirits, told them, "Except they would give him his watch, he would follow them." Walton observing this, took the pistol from Lee, and made his escape over the fields; but Lee having the watch, was closely pursued, and taken with the watch upon him.

He was first committed to Bridewell, and continued there six weeks: during his stay there, God was pleased to incline the heart of one to visit those who were there confined, and to publish the glad tidings of salvation! and God gave Lee an ear to hear the gospel sound, and an heart to embrace it: he took great delight in hearing: and a visible alteration was observed in his whole behaviour. He was convinced of his lost and undone state; was sensible how vile and guilty he was before God: was much by himself in reading and prayer, frequently and earnestly crying for mercy. But he was very fearful lest his many and great sins would exclude him from the favour of God: and though he was only guilty of this robbery, yet he acknowledged himself a vile hell-deserving creature, for his whole life. It was now the grief of his heart that he had ever sinned against such a good and gracious God: who he acknowledged had been frequently striving with him. For (said he) I remember when I
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have been drinking and merry-making with my companions, in the midst of my mirth, great horror and distress have seized me; that I have oft-times been forced to leave my company and retire by myself. I have been frequently distressed on account of my sin: my conscience has checked me in, and after the committing of it; but by company and mirth it would soon wear off, though not so, but at times it would return again.

The very first time he heard the preaching in Bridewell, the terrors of the Almighty fell upon him, and the arrows of God stuck fast in his soul. The sense of his crime (not as it was merely against the laws of man; but as it was against the law of God) and all his former sins greatly distressed him. The thoughts of death, but especially of a judgment to come, made him tremble exceedingly. He feared the wrath to come, and knew not how to flee from it. He was desirous to know what he must do to be saved; but did not see Christ the way of salvation. He was now crying out undone! undone! and writing bitter things against himself. He was so desirous to hear the gospel, that he would rather lose the favour of his relations and friends that visited him, than lose one opportunity: saying, "He had but one friend to please, and that was Christ."

He heard with such attention and affection, that he seemed even to eat the words of the preacher. He earnestly longed for the pardon of his sins : but for the first three weeks he had not the least glimpse of comfort.

Shortly after, as he was in prayer, crying earnestly for mercy, under great horror of soul, God broke in upon him in a wonderful manner, which he thus expressed to the person that preached.

" I believe now my peace is made with God through Jesus Christ. I experience a great change in my soul, for while I was at prayer, last night, in great terror, apprehensive that I was going immediately body and soul to hell : I cried out so loud that my fellow-prisoners in the next ward heard me, and called to know what was the matter ; I told them that I was going to hell, and begged their prayers for me : but while I was in the midst of this horror and despair, I suddenly experienced a blessed and comfortable change : my mind was immediately calmed : I believed my sins were forgiven : the fear of hell was taken away : and I was so far from fearing death, that I was now more desirous to die, than to live."

He earnestly desired prayer to God in his behalf, and wept bitterly that ever he should sin against him. It was very observable from this time, that the greater sense he experienced of the mercy of God to him, the greater hatred and abhorrence

horrence he had of sin, and of himself for committing it.

He was now more serious in hearing the word than ever: was frequently singing of psalms and hymns. He could not bear to hear any of his fellow prisoners profane the name of God, but would reprove them and exhort them with a serious concern to reflect on the consequences of such a behaviour: he admonished them to be thoughtful about their precious and immortal souls.

"Oh! (said he) did you but feel the terrors I lately did for my sin, you would dread the thoughts of ever sinning again."

"I have (says he, to a friend) deserved eternal death; but blessed be God who hath taken away the sting of death, and the guilt of sin: and now I can walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and not be afraid: now I can lay down and rise up, can live and die in peace."

Being removed from Bridewell to Newgate, to be tried at the Old-Bailey, the day before he was brought to the bar, he said, "Shortly I shall appear before the bar of man, and receive a sentence of death on this body; but this is my comfort, before man condemns me, God, the eternal God, has pardoned me: I shall stand guilty before man, but guiltless before God."

Being

Being asked "How he, who acknowledged himself a sinner, could stand guiltless before God?"

He replied, "Because Jesus Christ hath washed away my sins in his own blood; and I am justified by his grace; my sins are covered with his righteousness, and he hath blotted them out of the book of his remembrance."

It was asked again, "How he knew that Christ had taken away his sins, and that he was washed in his blood?"

He replied: "As a lost and undone sinner, I have laid hold on Jesus Christ by faith: I rest the whole of my salvation upon him: I have believed in him: and he hath adopted me into his family: the spirit of God bears witness with my spirit, that I am a child of God. Thus I know that all my sins are pardoned, and let death come when it will, I am ready: for I am assured, as soon as this body is dead, my soul will be with Jesus in paradise."

One present said, "That we had need be cautious of deceiving our own souls, and advised him to be modest in his expressions: for many who had made a great profession for many years, could not speak with such confidence as he did."

He answered, "I speak it from a certainty of the thing: that which I see and feel, I testify unto you.

Sir, If these heavy irons were removed from me, should not I be sensible of it; and could not

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I by experience declare to others that my irons were removed, and my legs were at liberty? Would not the alteration I felt, be a sufficient foundation to assert the satisfaction I found by the removal of them? Why thus it was lately with my soul: it was fettered down to sin: I was a slave to my lusts, and I could no more get rid of my sins, than I can of these irons; but while I was fearing and expecting to be cast into hell every moment, Jesus Christ came and knocked off my irons, my sins: he shut the doors of hell, and opened the doors of heaven; and set my soul at liberty. God has made me, who was a slave of the devil, to be a subject of Christ. I am brought from my lusts and pleasures which I loved, to love nothing else but Jesus Christ. And can such an alteration be wrought in my soul, and I be ignorant thereof?——O blessed be God, this change fills me with joy: I am full of joy: joy, not to be expressed: for Christ loves me, and I love Christ, and I shall shortly be with him for ever."

One saying, he had a heavy pair of irons on. Oh! (says he) these are the cursed fruits of sin: this is the honour the devil's servants have: these are the badges that declare to whom I did belong, and tell what dirty work I have been engaged in. Ah, cursed sin, that exposes us to such misery here, and to ten-thousand times ten-thousand worse

worse hereafter ! It was my sins made me liable to be the devil's prisoner, in the dreadful prison of hell for ever : but the Lord hath spread all my sins before my face, that I might see the magnitude and the multitude of them ; and then blowed them away with a blast of his Holy Spirit. All my sins appeared before me, and they looked like the devil from whence they came : but then Jesus Christ cast them all behind his back, and made me whiter than driven snow in his presence."

Being advised to plead, not guilty, when called to the bar, and told, perhaps it might save his life :

He replied : " I will not tell a lie to save ten thousand lives. It is true, life is sweet, but the love and favour of God is sweeter to me than life itself : how do I know, but while I am telling of a lie to save my life, I may be struck dead, and lose my precious soul for ever ? I shall therefore plead guilty ; not with a design to obtain the favour of man thereby ; for I expect, nor deserve none ; but because I would not offend God, and grieve his Holy Spirit."

A by-stander asked him, whether he was willing to die ?

He said, " When I consult with flesh and blood, it seems hard to leave the world in the bloom of my youth ; but when I consider I am going to him whom my soul loves, then I long to be dissolved, and to be with Christ Jesus."

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This, with much more to the same import, he uttered, with a chearful countenance, and with such an humble, yet confident boldness, as filled all with admiration that heard him.

A Roman Catholic, being present, could not believe that it was possible for any one to know his sins were forgiven; but acknowledged he believed Matthew to be a pious young man, and that if it was to be known here, he did know it.

A near relation being of the same opinion, as to the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, he said, "Believe me, as I shortly expect to die, and look on myself as a dying man, I am positive God for Christ's sake hath pardoned all my sins: and I am not afraid to face death, for death cannot hurt me."

To some, he said, "My living in an ale-house exposed me to much evil company, and I was forced to hear much cursing and swearing, to which I myself was too much addicted: This, with my living in uncleanness, made me forget God; so that God for my manifold sins, left me to commit the crime, for which I am justly to lose my life. But I have no cause to complain, since God hath made me to repent, and see the evil of my ways in my chains: and glory be to his name, he hath set my soul at liberty. Oh! blessed be his name for his unspeakable goodness to me, so vile and wretched a sinner, for he hath enabled
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me to repent with a repentance not to be repented of. I formerly took great pleasure in the committing sin, but now I hate the very thoughts of sin; and I really believe (by God's grace) I could not commit a sin to gain a kingdom."

After the person, by whom he was first convinced, had been with him, he cried out, "Oh, that he could be with me always, then would my prison be a palace, and my confinement better than liberty!——But why do I want a man to be with me? Have I not the presence of God with me? Have I not communion with Jesus Christ? And that is more valuable than all the helps and conversation of poor sinful man."

Being informed there was a minister belonging to the goal, who would help him in his addresses to the almighty God:

He answered, "Why don't he then? Why don't he come and instruct me? Why don't he wrestle with God for me? I see no regard paid to the immortal souls of any that are confined here. They are running head-long to hell, and no one seeks to stop them. None prays with; none admonishes, reproves, exhorts them; but he that is filthy, is left to be filthy still. What! Have the prisoners in Newgate, immortal souls! and yet no one regardeth them? Are they so good as not to need reproof and admonition? Or are they so bad as to be past recovery? Who can tell, but
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by frequent, earnest and heart-searching preaching, God might reach some hellish sinner here, as he reached me in Bridewell? And shall the servants of the most high God be forbid to preach in Newgate!—What! forbid to preach to the servants of the devil, did I say? Devils incarnate; but yet they are not blacker than I: and the blood of Christ hath reached me, and the same blood can cleanse the most defiled and vilest sinner here.—Lord, pity us in Newgate, and send some one to preach thy word; and do thou make it effectual to reach their hearts.”

When he was brought to the bar, he said but little; only pleaded guilty to the indictment: but when he received sentence of death, with an audible voice, he said, “Though I stand condemned at the bar of man, I shall be acquitted at the bar of God; for he hath forgiven me all my sins, and assured me of his glory.”

After his return back to prison, he was solid and serious, yet remarkably chearful: crying out “What a vile wretch am I; and yet God for his Son’s sake hath pardoned me, and I shall stand before his throne, and praise him for ever; for I am an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ; a citizen of Zion, and a companion with saints and angels to all eternity: Oh how do I long to die, that I may be with Jesus Christ, who is my lot and portion: oh, the happiness I shall enjoy

enjoy when I have left this clay ! O, help me fir,
to glorify God : I do praise him ; but shew me
how to do it more and more, and more still : I
cannot do it enough till I come to heaven, and I
shall not do it enough then.—Blessed be God for
what I have experienced in these cells : these
dark and dismal cells have been light and pleasant
places to me ; for I have had the prospect of eter-
nal glory ; and have seen that eternal glory re-
served for me ! Thither, thither, am I going : I
have but one storm to endure, and I shall be in
harbour for ever.”

One asked, “ Whether he should not be glad of
a reprieve, and whether he had any hopes of not
being included in the dead warrant ?

He replied, “ My flesh and blood desire life,
but my soul longs to be where death shall be no
more. Welcome life ; and welcome death : if I
am reprieved, I shall bless God ; and if I am in-
cluded in the dead warrant, I shall still praise and
magnify his name.”

One inquiring “ Whether he had any to make
intercession for him ?”

He replied, “ I have no one on earth to inter-
cede in my behalf : but I have one in the court
of heaven, who hath interceded for me, and ob-
tained my pardon. My pardon is sealed above,
and sealed with the broad seal of king Jesus ; that
shall abide to all eternity !—Jesus is my friend,
and he will prepare a place for me.”

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The two persons that were condemned for murder seeing his seriousness, and the time he spent in singing and prayer; cursed him for "Making such a-do, about nothing," (as they termed it) and said to him, "Why, we shall only be hanged."

"Only be hanged (says he) and is not that bad enough, to die in ones youth and vigour, such a shameful death?"

They answered, "Why we must all die, one time or other; and now is as well as another time."

"How can you (replied he) speak so carelessly about the most important thing in the world? But you forget.—Death is not all; for after death there is a judgment and eternity! Indeed for my part I am easy; because I know I shall be happy; but I wonder you can be so easy, and your peace not made with God.—Why you are on the brink of hell, and will be miserable for ever, if you die without repentance."

Upon their laughing at what he said, he could not forbear weeping. He then turned away and said no more; but it had such an effect upon him, that he could not sleep all night, to think what an unhappy state they were in.

One of his fellow prisoners being asked, "Whether his peace was made with God, or whether he could say his sins were pardoned, as Mr. Lee did?" He replied, "He hoped it was." Mr. Lee immediately said, "That is a sure sign
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your peace is not made with God; for, if it was, you would not only hope it was, but be sure of it; you would feel the effects of it; your soul would be warmed with love; you would love Jesus Christ, and long to be with him?

The two prisoners that died with him; asked him to eat with them. He answered, "No——What, must we eat to grow fat for the grave? our thoughts had need to be engaged about other things, than in filling and pleasing the flesh."——They answered, "If we think so much, it will make us mad."——"What (said he) are you afraid of being mad by repenting of your sins? You have more need of being afraid of going to hell for the committing of them: if we had not all been mad, we had not committed those things that brought us here. And I am sure we shall be madder still, if before we have lost our bodies, we take no heed to save our souls."——"Ay! But (says one of them) we shall some, if not all of us, get off, for the dead warrant is not come down yet."——"What then (said he) if the dead warrant saves any of our bodies, it does not save our souls. We have need to be thoughtful about death, and to seek to have our peace made with God, if we escape death at this time."

One of the prisoners said, "Can you now forgive your prosecutor?"——"As I am a dying man (said he) I love all mankind, my prosecutor and

and all, as I love my own soul; I do not know any person, not even the greatest enemy I have or ever had, but whom I as heartily love, as I do myself; and I can pray for them as readily as I can for my greatest friends."

The night before the dead warrant came down, he was filled with more joy than usual, and said, "Now the Lord is smiling upon me; now the Lord is smiling upon me; now he is speaking comfort to my soul; now, now, I find nothing shall separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus: O how does the Father of mercies manifest his love to me, and makes me to taste the joys of heaven before I come there: now my heart feels what my mouth cannot utter: he hath made darkness light before me; my dark cell, and my dark soul, is full of the glory of the Lord; I am as full as my poor soul can contain of the divine presence: and if the foretastes of glory are so great, what must heaven itself be? God hath opened my eyes to behold his glory, and my soul is dazzled at the sight of it."

When the dead warrant came, and he was informed he was in it: "Blessed be God, (he said) I am not daunted: I receive the account with joy: and had it been to have died immediately, it would not have surprized me; for I am ready for it—Lord, thou knowest I am waiting for thy salvation; and must I stay till Wednesday before

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"I am with thee? Why must my longing soul be kept from thee till then?—But it is thy will, and I am content to wait till thou shalt take me for ever unto thyself.—O what a blessed day will that be to my soul, when it will be separated from its body, to be with Christ for ever! Death, do thy worst; thou canst not hurt me; for thy sting is taken away, and thou canst but carry me to glory; to glory prepared for me.—Lord, into thy arms I will throw myself. Lord, I come, I come; I long to come to thee; I resign myself to thee, and I depend for salvation only on thee, my dear Lord Jesus Christ; thou art my Saviour: thou art my God, and thou wilt be mine for ever, and ever. Thou hast forgiven me, and by thy grace I forgive my enemies. O that they may all be saved, and brought to live with thee in thy glory.—O who could have thought there had been so much sweetness at the bottom of this bitter cup?—O Walton, Walton! turn unto God, before it is too late: let my death be the means of making thee leave thy evil ways: and may God change thy heart and forgive thee, as he hath forgiven me."

"Oh (said he) I find more solid joy and comfort in death than ever I found in all the pleasures of life. Oh, that my relations would not weep for me; it grieves me to see them grieve. Oh, that they may speedily turn to God, and then,
though

though we part here in sorrow, we shall meet hereafter in joy ; never, never, to part again.—Now, my God, I can sing of thy salvation : my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness : and shortly shall I be, where I shall sing praises, without ceasing, for ever.—What will my friends weep when I am thus to be employed ! O let them learn to follow me : not to follow me in sin, to prison, or to a gallows ; but follow me to Christ Jesus.—O that they would attend to the voice of a dying man, and cry to God for his grace, that they may break off their sins by repentance, and lay hold of Christ by faith, for everlasting life and salvation. Beg of God a broken spirit ; since a broken and contrite heart, God will not despise.”

The night before his execution, he spent in prayer and praise, and was heard to say, “ Lord my time is short here, let me not fear in my last moments : give me courage to face death : let me not be afraid of its terrors : let thy grace fill me with consolation : and let me go off the stage of life, testifying what thou hast done for my soul. May I declare thy pardoning grace to me. To thee, O Lord, do I fly for succour. To thee I come with a Saviour in my arms ; and, if I perish, it shall be crying out, *God be merciful to me a sinner !* If thou hurlest me down to hell, I will keep my hold on Christ Jesus, and I will not let him go till thou dost bless me.”

Praying

Praying with a friend, (he said) Lord strengthen my faith in my dying moments, that I may not dishonour thee by the fear of death, but enable me to bear a testimony to thy pardoning grace. May I die in the full assurance of faith, and leave a testimony of the freeness of thy grace, and of thy readiness to pardon the chief of sinners.

The morning of his execution, when his fetters were knocked off, he pulled off his hat, and with great seriousness, blessed God that had vouchsafed him his presence, and prayed for the increase and strength of grace to hold out to the end.

The person who was taking off his irons said, "He was afraid he should hurt him." "Oh, fear not, said he, nothing can hurt me here, and I shall shortly be where nothing shall hurt me to all eternity."

When the Ordinary of Newgate asked him "if his peace was made with God?" He answered, "Yea I know my peace is made with God, and that God, for Christ's sake, hath pardoned all my sins."

As he was going to execution, he seemed full of prayer and praise: his countenance chearful, and his deportment serious and solid. In Tyburn-Road, a gentleman begged leave that the cart might be stopped for two young women to speak to him.

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To one of them he said, "My dear Nanny, don't fret for me, for I am going to heaven: look up with an eye of faith, and you will see the holy angels waiting to be my convoy. My Lord Jesus is calling me, and I shall shortly be with him in paradise."

When he came to Tyburn, and saw among the spectators, the instrument, under God, of his conversion, he called out to him.

"Now I know you and I shall soon meet together in glory. I am going thither, and I know you shall soon follow after. I know that I have been a vile sinner, undeserving the mercy of God: but I know also that God, for Christ's sake, hath pardoned all my sins. Oh, this is a happy time indeed! blessed be God I am not afraid to die. Now I experience what you so often told me about the children of God's triumphing over the fears of death."—Then with a smile he said, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; the strength of sin is the law. But blessed be God who hath given me the victory over sin, and over death, through our Lord Jesus Christ.—Surely God's mercies are unbounded: they extend to the chief of sinners: for since the grace of God hath reached me, what room is there for the vilest sinner to despair of pardon?"

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To

The last words he was heard to speak, was to a near relation: "My dear, don't vex yourself for me; for I shall be in heaven in two or three minutes."—Prayers being ended, he committed his spirit into the hands of God, with a chearful countenance.

His body was taken care of by his friends, and on the Sunday following, was decently interred in Tindall's burial ground.—Mr. H. and another friend, performed the last office of prayer and praise over his grave, before a great concourse of people; where we must leave him to rest till the morning of the resurrection, when his body, sown in dishonour, shall be raised in glory.

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